

Needham Human Rights Committee Meeting Minutes

April 28, 2016

Amelia Klein, co-chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm in the conference room of the Broadmeadow School.

Committee members in attendance: Abdul Cader Asmal, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard, Barry Ehrlich, Marlene Schultz (co-chair), Matt Schroeder, Lt. John Kraemer (Needham Police).

Committee members absent: Jo-Anne Coffey-McCormick, Ashok Mehta, Jeremy Sutherland, Bud Schram.

Guests: Kerry Hurwitch, Joseph Tierney

1. Minutes of the March 17, 2016 NHRC meeting were unanimously approved.

2. Old Business

Committee Members

Amelia arranged with the Needham Housing Authority to include an announcement in their newsletter for anyone interested in joining us, as we're supposed to have a Housing Authority resident on the Committee.

Matt did an online application, waiting to hear.

Webpage

No update.

Follow-up Forum on Islam

A subcommittee consisting of Amelia, Marlene and Abdul met with Amira, Muslim Chaplain at Wellesley College, to plan this further. The focus would be on issues such as:

- What is the attraction and threat of ISIS?
- How do we "unpack" ISIS from Islam?
- What should be the response of the US to this challenge?
- What is the role of the Muslim community?

We are interested in having Noah Feldman, a Harvard law professor and expert on ISIS, come as an expert; Wellesley College is willing to work with us and possibly pay his fee. Amira is working on arranging this for the fall. We discussed having the program at Wellesley College and if Needham residents would be willing to go there. *The Center at the Heights* is also a possible location. Details to follow.

3. New Business

Committee Member handbook

The issue of public participation at our meetings was raised. We've been informal about this up to now, but should we be more structured? The Committee Member Handbook states that:

While the public is permitted to attend an open meeting, an individual may not address the public body without permission of the chair. An individual is not permitted to disrupt a meeting of a public body, and at the request of the chair, all members of the public shall be silent. If after clear warning a person continues to be disruptive, the chair may order the person to leave the meeting, and if the person does not leave, the chair may authorize a police officer to remove the person. (page 6)

We discussed designating a specific period at the start of each meeting for public comment, and informing guests of this and of a protocol for input. Marlene mentioned that the Handbook also provides for our being able to meet in Executive Session. The rationale most relevant to us is:

To consider the discipline or dismissal of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual. (Appendix D, #2)

Other

Joseph Tierney, a guest at the meeting, raised his concern about receiving an email from us which he believes mischaracterized the Islam Forum. We clarified that this note did not originate with us but with the JCC, which we then forwarded to him. This raises the question of who is on our communication list and what should be sent to them. Mr. Tierney requested to stay on our list.

4. Reports

Immigration Task Force

Cynthia presented information about an opportunity for our involvement in a refugee resettlement initiative. This would involve co-sponsoring, along with the Immigration Task Force and League of Women Voters, a public forum on June 1 or 2. The goal would be to inform people about the global refugee crisis and opportunities for local action. They are reaching out to Merissa Khurma, at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, to be a speaker; there is also the possibility of having 2-3 panelists who are refugees.

This is connected with current efforts to resettle refugees in towns such as Lynn, Lowell and Dorchester. The forum will present a range of activities that groups can participate in to support this; you don't have to be a resident of the receiving community to be involved. Items will be collected at the forum that will be needed by the resettled families.

Diversity Initiative

The Diversity Summit will take place on November 19. There was much positive feedback from MLK Day. The observation was made that parents are more likely to attend events that are connected with the schools.

Needham Schools

We continued our discussion about initiating a dialogue with the district about students' emotional safety. The survey data that was collected from parents and students in January – some of which addressed this issue - would be a good starting point for discussion. Our primary questions are:

- What did the survey show about this?
- What progress has been made on “District Goal Two” regarding social and emotional safety, as well as cultural proficiency?
- What is the process by which a student or parent can have a grievance addressed?
- How can the NHRC work in partnership with the schools in this area?

Barry will contact Dan Gutekanst's office (through Diane Simmons) to arrange an initial meeting. We wondered whether the parents who met with us recently would want to participate in these conversations.

Town issues

No report.

Upcoming

At the next meeting we'll review the Committee Member Handbook regarding the election of officers, and discuss what the NHRC structure should look like. We'll conduct elections for our officers in May.

Upcoming recorders:

May 19 - Bud

June 16- Ashok

Meeting adjourned in time for second half of the Celtics game.

NEXT MEETING THURSDAY, May 19, 2016 7:30PM.

Respectfully submitted, Barry Ehrlich (Recorder)